

Letter from Alexander Graham Bell to Mabel Hubbard Bell, May 27, 1895, with transcript

ALEXANDER GRAHAM BELL TO MABEL (Hubbard) BELL Beinn Bhreagh, C. B. May 27th, Tues., 1895. My darling Mabel:

At last — at last a letter from you — Indeed I am in luck for there are two — one from Havre and one from Paris. I don't like your being on the other side of the Atlantic at all. Fourteen days for a letter to reach me! Then you ask questions for me to answer. Hope indeed you won't wait for my reply before deciding — for another fourteen days for the passage will make one month — before you can hear from me in reply. What sort of correspondence is that! How wonderful that we can cable to one another in a few seconds! — and even with all the delays that are due to messenger boys and etc., — I can get an answer from you in about a couple of hours. I hope you have registered your cable address “Lebam” — Have not ventured to use it — since you have not alluded to it by cable or letter.

(Interrupted)

Wednesday, May 28th, 1895.

Mr. Gwilleum spent afternoon in laboratory, dined with me and then I took him over the bay to Mrs. Kennan's where Dunlap met him. Mrs. Gwilleum and baby well. Saw Mr. and Mrs. Kennan and Mr. McCurdy — and Maud Mackeen. Mr. McCurdy will occupy his new house tomorrow — children not to know anything about it till the evening.

Mr. McCurdy has photographed all my sheep — with success I understand. Mrs. John McAuley has a baby boy, born 2 the day before yesterday. McInnis has finished — or rather nearly finished two dams in the gully above the stable. Two reservoirs have thus

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been formed which will hold a large amount of water. The old reservoir above Mr. Martin's house has not only supplied the house, but has been full to overflowing — all winter and spring — although no water has been brought from a distance! Mr. Martin was here yesterday evening — and I asked him about everything that would be of interest to you — and made notes of his replies for your “Callas” benefit. Can't find my notes and cannot remember a thing!! General result everything all right — excepting your which seem to have been frozen in cellar. Every promise of good crop of vegetables — and small fruits.

The trees in the orchard have all or nearly all born blossoms — and Mr. Martin thinks you will have some fruit this year — and that after this year they will bear continuously. Becky in the best of condition — and won't let me out of her sight. Poor little dog — she is great company for me now that I am all alone — even Mr. McCurdy away.

Maggie Campbell is taking good care of me — and has her niece with her to help in the house. Duncan too is on hand — and never away when wanted — a splendid fellow.

The Laboratory stuff from Boston arrived this morning — so we have been able to begin regular experiments this afternoon.

I am anxiously awaiting the birth of the last lamb expected this year — in order to complete my records. So far — 3 the sheep have bred true — not a solitary two — nipples lamb born this year. Day before yesterday upon waking up in morning found the following memorandum on my table from Mr. McCurdy — who had gone into town.

“John reports one single two — nipples black and white male — May 27/95.”

Thinking this was the expected lamb necessary to complete the births for this year, I entered the birth in my card catalogue — and set to work adding up and etc., — making tables of results for 1895. After spending two or three hours over this work — Mr. McCurdy informed me that the note referred to “John McAuley's baby boy!” By the by the date attached to his memorandum shows that the birth was yesterday morning — and not the

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day before. Will stop here for the present as I am anxious to work up the experiments made to-day in laboratory.

Thursday, May 30th, 1895.

My dates were wrong. This is 30th, yesterday was 29th, not 28th — so “the day before yesterday” was the 27th — the date of birth of the “single two — nipped black and white male.”

This afternoon was able to try 12 motors with fans — instead of 4. In winter experiments we used 2 motors. As we are working with low velocities — 2 motors gave very little “lift” unless we forced them to run at an injurious speed. By multiplying motors — and multiplying wings — I hoped to get greater lifts with low velocities — and more accurate lifts because greater. The error in weighing lifts is greater with 4 small than with large lifts. I think the error is within 2 grammes in any case. In a total lift of 10 grammes — the possible error (say 2 grammes is 2/10ths or #th of the total lift. Whereas in a lift of 100 grammes it is only 2/100ths or 1/50th of the whole.

The wings on aeroplanes are not completed yet — but we were able to make an experiment with 12 motors — angle 45° — without wings — today — and find that the lifts attained more than fulfilled expectations. Not only were the lifts great — with slow rotations — but we were able to get much greater speeds of rotation than before without forcing our motors to the sparking point — so that the range of lift is enormously increased. The wooden wings will give us about 32 square feet of wing surface — so that, I hope, for lifts large enough in all cases — to render errors of observation of minor importance.

Very much pleased with the promise of success. The framework however looks rather fragile — when we consider the large weights that must be carried by it. Mr. Ellie will strengthen it tomorrow in such a way — as to diminish very materially the chances of smashing it.

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The last lamb of the season has not yet appeared — anxiously looking for it.

A young ram has appeared which is marked in a very peculiar way. On the back near the tail appears a large blotch of peculiar colored wool. John McKillop calls it “Fox-colored” 5 and Mr. McCurdy “buff-colored.” I don't pretend to be an expert — upon colors — and so submit a specimen of the wool for your inspection. How would you name the color. It is at all events peculiar — and I am considering the advisability of developing that color in the flock — as a distinguishing mark of the breed. Is it sufficiently peculiar to be used for this purpose?

John has a theory for everything — and he accounts for the blotch in a characteristic manner. His brother's dog — a hound — paid a visit to the mountain — and scared all the sheep very badly — the mother of this lamb among the rest — and the result is, in this case, a blotch on the lamb of the color of the hound! Unfortunately for the hypothesis none of the other lambs have any similar marks upon them.

I am inclined to think it is a result of black blood in the father. The father was a black ram and no less than six of his children are black. So far — sixteen children have been born to him this year — and six of them are black — a large proportion. Men with black hair often have reddish or brownish beards and mustaches. My father had. Mr. McCurdy's mustache also has this peculiar reddish or brownish tinge — and to my eye — the wool on the blotch is of this character — rather reddish or brownish. What do you say? Is the color sufficiently peculiar to be bred into the flock as a distinguishing mark? Held on one moment — I will look at my records to be quite sure that the father of this lamb really was the black ram. We also had another ram (327) white. 417 or “Black Samson” is the black one. Wrong. No. 327, the white ram , is the father of this lamb! The 6 black-blood hypothesis is therefore weak. There is black blood however in his known ancestry. His grandmother (No. 147) was black. I think it probable we shall keep him. He combines the blood of several of our best four — nipped sheep including the rams General Lee (6 of 87), Rorie Neil (73) and the twin ram Hope (118). The other rams in his ancestry (vig.

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174, 246 and 327) were specially selected as the largest nipples males born in the years represented by their numbers (vig. 1891 (174), 1892 (246) and 1893 (327). His mother also — had both parents twins. Not twins of one another — but each had a twin brother or sister. We have named the lamb “Buff” as suggested by Mr. McCurdy.

Ancestry of “Buff” (504)

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Will not delay this letter any longer but will send it right off — with love to you all.

Your loving husband, Alec. P. S. He (Buff) has the largest nipples of all the male lambs born this year — and weighed no less than 9 pounds at birth. AGB. Mrs. Alexander Graham Bell, 7 Rue Scribe — Paris.